

Wirral Council

STRATEGIC HOUSING LAND AVAILABILITY
ASSESSMENT - APPENDIX 5



ROGER TYM & PARTNERS
Planners and Development Economists

Stage 3(b) Density Assumptions

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ROGER TYM & PARTNERS

61 Oxford Street,
Manchester M1 6EQ

t 0161 245 8900

f 0161 245 8901

e manchester@tymconsult.com

w www.tymconsult.com

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1 POLICY GUIDANCE

- 1.1 Paragraph 46 of PPS3 states that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should develop housing density policies having regard to:
- the spatial vision and strategy for housing development in their area, including the level of housing demand and need and the availability of suitable land in the area;
 - the current and future level and capacity of infrastructure, services and facilities such as public and private amenity space, in particular green and open space;
 - the desirability of using land efficiently and reducing, and adapting to, the impacts of climate change;
 - the current and future levels of accessibility, particularly public transport accessibility;
 - the characteristics of the area, including the current and proposed mix of uses; and
 - the desirability of achieving high quality, well-designed housing.
- 1.2 Para 47 of PPS3 states that while LPAs may wish to set out a range of densities across the plan area, 30 dwellings per hectare (dph) net should be taken as a national indicative minimum to guide policy development and decision-making, until local density policies are in place. Densities below this minimum will need to be justified according to such factors as those listed above.
- 1.3 In the 'Proposed Changes to the Draft RSS' report (March 2008), the Secretary of State recommended that the RSS for the North West should include a policy on housing density, specifying a minimum of 30 dph net and encouraging higher densities in urban areas and locations with good public transport accessibility. However, these proposals were not incorporated, and the final version of the RSS (September 2008) contains no specific figures or recommendations regarding density of development in the region. The only reference to housing densities in the approved RSS is provided at the end of paragraph 7.19, which states that it is *'...important to build housing at appropriate densities taking account of local circumstances.'*
- 1.4 There is currently no saved policy from the Wirral UDP regarding specific housing densities across the Borough; however, policy HS5 contains a number of areas where density and design guidelines apply in order to maintain the character of the areas. Moreover, saved policy HS4 expects the scale of new housing development *'to relate well to surrounding property, in particular with regard to existing densities and form of development.'*
- 1.5 In Section 2 of this note we consider the densities on schemes in Wirral which have been granted planning permission in recent years. We then take account of housebuilders' current aspirations in terms of density, unit type, target markets, and so on, before deciding on the specific density rates to be applied in the Wirral SHLAA.

2 ANALYSIS OF DENSITY TRENDS AND ASSUMPTIONS FOR THE SHLAA

Analysis of Density Trends

- 2.1 Table 2.1 summarises the densities being achieved on residential schemes across the Borough which were under construction in April 2009.

Table 2.1 Average Densities in Housing Schemes Under Construction in April 2009¹

Sub-area	Density (dwellings per hectare)		All Sites
	Sites under 0.4 ha	Sites above 0.4 ha	
RSS Inner	81.99	39.80	49.79
RSS Outer	47.35	29.75	33.19
RSS Rural	14.27	25.31	21.93
All Areas	38.81	29.19	31.12

- 2.2 Across the Borough, schemes under construction at April 2009 achieved an overall average density of 31.12 dwellings per hectare (dph). However, there was a wide variation between densities in the Inner, Outer and Rural areas, reflecting the much greater incidence of flatted developments in the more urbanised Inner Area. There is also a marked difference between small sites and large sites, with higher density development generally being in the more urbanised Inner Area.
- 2.3 The CLG's 'Live Table' No. P232², which shows the average densities achieved on residential schemes between 2005 and 2008, gives a density figure of 51 dph for Wirral. However, it would not be appropriate to use this as an average density rate to be applied in the Wirral SHLAA because, in the past two years, developers have moved away from high density schemes and towards traditional two-storey family housing, which is invariably lower density.

Assumptions for the SHLAA

- 2.4 As explained above, the housebuilding industry has reverted to traditional family housing schemes. These are a tried and tested product, and housebuilders are confident that they will be attractive to the market. Apartments and three-storey town houses are not likely to be included, and are not likely to be included on most schemes over the next 5 years, and probably beyond.

Housing Schemes

- 2.5 Given the clear shift in favour of family housing, most housebuilders are currently working to approximately 14.5 dwellings per acre (dpa), which equates to 36 dph. Accordingly, it was agreed that 36 dph would represent an appropriate, and realistic, density for all sites deemed to be suitable for housing schemes. This density rate is lower than the average density that was achieved on residential developments in the Borough between 2005 and 2008, but is slightly above the figure in sites under construction in April 2009, and above the minimum required by PPS3.

¹ April 2009 has been chosen rather than the study base date of April 2008 to provide as accurate and up-to-date a picture as possible of development densities.

² Table P232 is available on the CLG's website via the following link:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planningbuilding/planningstatistics/livetables/landusechange/>

Mixed Schemes (Houses and Flats)

- 2.6 On the minority of housing schemes which do still include a flatted element, developers and housebuilders are now reluctant to provide more than 20 per cent of total units as apartments or town houses, and are therefore working on the basis of 21.5 dpa, or 53 dph. Accordingly, we have used a proxy density rate of 53 dph net for sites where it is assumed that a mix of housing and flats could be achieved.

Flatted Schemes

- 2.7 Some sites remain best suited to flatted development, although they will invariably be located in central areas because developers of sites in more suburban locations will almost certainly favour family housing for the foreseeable future. Where flats have been identified as the most appropriate housing type, we have assumed a development density of 75 dph within the HMR area, and 60 dph elsewhere.
- 2.8 In summary, for the purposes of our analysis we have applied the densities specified in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2 Density Rates Used in the Wirral SHLAA

Site Location Characteristics	Density (dph net)
Identified as appropriate for flats, and located in the HMR area	75
Identified as appropriate for flats and located outside of the HMR area	60
Identified as appropriate for a mix of houses and flats	53
Identified as appropriate for houses	36

- 2.9 It should be emphasised that in some cases we have specific information with regard to likely yield figures (for example, from masterplans and “call for sites” submissions). Where this is the case we have reviewed the number of dwellings proposed for the site and - provided the resultant density seems reasonable in the local context - we have used this as the expected site yield, rather than applying the standard density rates described above.